

## the peaceful old broad river

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# the peaceful old broad river

by [Sienne](#)

## Summary

She expected to be walking to her death in the hope that it will give her family a longer, if not better life. She should have known Wei Wuxian would not let her have the last word.

## Notes

This is my actual submission for the time travel trope event!

Unbetaed so I will probably come back to edit it in a few days, just to check on grammar and clarity.

This fic fought me almost the whole way and it diverged from my outline so many times it barely resembles what I had first planned. Still, I am satisfied with it.

I hope you enjoy :)

Edit 16/10: I have cleaned up some typos and grammar mistakes (pesky present tense sneaking into a past tense narration!), as well as tried to shorten some long sentences. On a happier note, as some of you have been informed in the comments, I am actually writing the wangxian sequel. It should be a short multichapter, and I'm hoping to start publishing it on wwx's b-day :)

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

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Wei Wuxian strained desperately against the numbness that had spread through his body. He put all his will into it, but Wen Qing's needle held true – he could not move at all, not even one finger.

“I’ve said what I had to say, explained things, said farewell.” Wen Qing’s voice was rather melancholic, strangely at odds with her relaxed expression; Wei Wuxian never wanted to see her so resigned yet relieved, despondent yet calm again in his life, but it was not up to him. Their lives seemed to have been cut short, as decided by the great unchallenged cultivation world. In fact, if he didn’t *do* something, he will never see her in his life at all.

“Then... goodbye.”

Wei Wuxian looked at Wen Ning with pleading eyes, but he knew it was no use. Wen Ning would never go against his sister’s word like that, not unless his morals were challenged. Perhaps that was what had drawn Wei Wuxian to Wen Ning at first, a shared camaraderie, an intangible feeling of having met the brother of his soul.

This time, Wen Ning was of the same mind as Wen Qing – to save Wei Wuxian’s life at the expense of his own. Perhaps he felt it was his due for his part in Jin Zixuan’s death and in Wei Wuxian’s ostracization by the cultivation world, yet Wei Wuxian himself felt it couldn’t be further from the truth. Sweet Wen Ning, who went through his life with his head held low but with dignity, upholding principles that many have long since forgotten or deemed inconvenient. How it rankled, this injustice – Wei Wuxian had wanted to give this boy a second chance at life that had been so unfairly cut short, yet now he was the reason Wen Ning felt he needed to go, leave this family they’ve made, and face death.

Wen Qing continued her farewell, uncaring or perhaps caring too much for how Wei Wuxian felt, his nerves fraught, his mind tearing itself into pieces to find a solution to the many, many unsolvable troubles they faced now. At the same time he tried to find the words to convince her, to make her reconsider perhaps, but it was all for naught. It was his brother and sister that were going to their deaths head on, but to Wei Wuxian it would be the same if it was his life that was ending.

“I’m sorry. And, thank you.” Those words... they were, in fact, a life sentence. Wei Wuxian wouldn’t live without them. He couldn’t. If he didn’t do... something... *anything*...

*Concentrate, Wei Wuxian!*

They can’t go. But they will, and he can’t...

No, that’s not true. It can’t be. He refuses.

*Do something! Think, think, THINK!*

It felt a bit like that time he had spent in the Burial Mounds the first time, all alone with his mind that hadn't actually been his, his mind that had been filled with the many thousand-years old resentful souls, them taking over and making him believe he was going mad. He had survived then, succeeded in overcoming them, he had been stronger than them.

He would not lose his family, either.

Fighting against the needle's hold, Wei Wuxian brought his hand to his lips, trembling from exertion, and bit as hard as he could. The blood filled his mouth. There was no time. He put his hand on one of the many talisman papers littering his bed, put a few strokes that his genius but half-mad with grief mind could come up with, and thrown the two hastily-made talismans at Wen Ning and Wen Qing, just as she was turning her back to him.

The talismans fell down; the paper too light, Wei Wuxian's strength too feeble. Wen Ning picked the talismans up, met his eyes, and that...

That was the last thing he saw as darkness welcomed him.



Wen Qing closed her eyes as she turned her back to Wei Wuxian, ready to leave the cave, the life she had made for herself and her family here. She couldn't show her brothers any cracks in her resolve, but she also couldn't help the tears that successfully escaped from her tight control. She will allow herself this moment to grieve, and then she will take Wen Ning, and together they will save their family. She took a few unsteady breaths while walking with steady legs, then opened her eyes.

Her breath caught in her throat. It was all wrong. It felt like a misstep.

Gone were the stone-slab bed, the cold, dark cave dimly lit with candles. Gone were the many partly-finished trinkets, half-written manuscripts, scattered all over the floor talismans. Gone were Wen Ning and Wei Wuxian.

Wen Qing squinted her eyes against the suddenly brightly lit room, the mid-day sun rays reflecting off of the many glass bottles and vials filled with herbs, pastes, medicine and tea leaves that were neatly stacked on the many shelves and cabinets. She had only just been walking, but now she was sitting down in front of a desk. No, not *a* desk. It was her desk, her work table. She sat still for a long moment, not comprehending what was happening.

There was no question where she was. This part of her life was very memorable for how stable and almost carefree it was on a surface level yet nerve-wracking and hectic on a deeper, more real level, always demanding tight control of her to perform the duplicitous nature of being a healer in a ruthless sect.

Wen Qing was in her old office in the Yiling Supervisory Office, the way it was before the Wen Sect lost everything, before the Sunshot Campaign was won by the sect alliance.

So she knew where she was, and she might not know *how exactly* this happened, but she knew who.

Wei Wuxian. It must have been him.

Or she was hallucinating, but Wen Qing knew herself well and believed she would not succumb to any mind manipulation so swiftly and without opposition.

She knew the where. The who, the how and the why were also one and the same. She did not really need to wonder about the *why* – the motivation was obvious and she tried not to think about it too deeply yet, the heartache of losing her family too close, too great – and she did not really care for the *how*. As long as she knew Wei Wuxian was the one who did it (and she didn't have any reason to believe otherwise, while she had many reasons to believe it was him) the *how* was not important in the least.

There was, however, something crucial Wen Qing did not know.

*When exactly* was she? Was it too late already?

A quick walk around the compound informed her that Wen Ning was not there (was he in Lotus Pier already, or an archery practice, or a patrol, or were all her hastily made plans moot because she was too far in time?). The Wen cultivators stationed in Yiling still treated her with respect and not the thinly veiled disgust or pity, the way they started to after it was speculated that she had been the one who had saved the Jiang Sect heir. The only reason she had not been officially demoted was that they had no proof other than circumstances, and that would have not passed Wen Ruohan's consideration. Not when Wen Qing was too valuable and a prized member of the clan.

She did, however, hear snippets of gossip from two young cultivators procrastinating on their sword dueling practice.

"I heard that the Jiang Sect Leader begged Wen-gongzi for his life!" one of them said, moving his sword in a pretend practice, the minimal flick of his wrist bearing nary a resemblance to any of the proper Wen sword techniques.

"No, no, no, he begged for *his wife's* life," the other corrected as if his information was of any more value. It wasn't. If Wen Qing remembered correctly (and she definitely did, because at that point in her life she had had to remember the slightest detail to ensure her and Wen Ning could live safely and as comfortably as the situation had allowed for) they were newbies that had spent their whole time as Wen cultivators stationed in one of the annexed minor sects in Jingling and moved here only two days ago. They could not have seen even a glance of Wen Chao, let alone the attack on Lotus Pier.

That gossip did reveal that the attack had happened, and Wen Ning's disappearance meant that he must have left for Lotus Pier to save Wei Wuxian.

...At least she hoped he went to save Wei Wuxian. Considering they had both been in that cave, it was very possible that whatever Wei Wuxian had done, he moved back in time not only her, but also Wen Ning. Maybe even himself. She could barely hope, but truth be told, if any of her brothers traveled as well she would be very relieved. Wen Qing was a capable woman and were she alone she would do her best to use this second chance she had been given, but she was not so prideful to not accept that having at least one other person to share

this with would ease her stress. It would also be helpful in planning for their future survival away from the sects, to have someone to bounce ideas off of.

Anyway, she will know for sure if Wen Ning came with her soon enough. It would have been better to arrive even earlier. To rescue Wei Wuxian before the attack and run away with much fewer repercussions than rescuing a wanted man entailed, but whatever her own feelings on the matter Wen Qing could objectively tell that taking Wei Wuxian away from the Jiang family would have been difficult at that time, his feelings of debt and gratitude too strong to sever his ties to them. Jiang Fengmian might not have let him go easily as well – Wei Wuxian was undoubtedly one of the most acknowledged disciples in his generation (in Wen Qing's opinion, he was the best of them all, but she could acknowledge that such opinion was less objective), and the situation that followed made it obvious that he had been raised to be the shield and the weapon of the Jiang children.

She thought out a tentative plan of action. Granted, the plan was more tentative than she would like, but there were far too many variables and she was far too short on time. Wen Qing could devise a few plans for the next few days at most, but considering she still had no idea what the actual situation was, that was the best she could do at this time. She will have to improvise based on what is happening at the moment. Wen Qing desperately wished Wei Wuxian had come as well, if only because it would make all her plans much, much easier, and also because improvising in difficult situations and getting the best possible result was more his area of expertise.

Wen Qing stood up from her place at the desk, took a long breath to shake loose any lingering uneasiness, and left her office again. It was time to move the plan along. She walked briskly to the wing she remembered Wen Ning living in, straining her ears to listen to any carelessly thrown words that could help her or warn her in time. There was nothing of substance, all information she knew - Wen Ning had come back, but he wasn't alone.

Arriving at the door she heard the commotion inside, entered and quickly closed the door, attaching to it one of the silencing talismans that Wei Wuxian had invented. It wouldn't do if anything happening in the room was overheard. Wen Qing glanced quickly over the whole room and couldn't help the crushing disappointment suddenly blocking her chest.

"You see a Wen-dog and you don't kill him?! Do you want to die?!" Jiang Wanyin was literally spitting mad, his eyes red and bulging, voice half-hoarse, half-screeching. His hands were on Wei Wuxian's throat, which was unforgivable, but knowing he was without a golden core Wen Qing wasn't afraid for Wei Wuxian's life. She was, however, filled with rage that was quickly growing larger and larger, feeling like it will soon leave her body and blast the dratted boy apart, giving her the excuse.

"Keep your ungrateful hands off him," Wen Qing remarked coldly, cutting Jiang Wanyin off and making herself the center of attention.

Wen Ning, who had been frozen stiff until then, used the moment to jerk Jiang Wanyin's hands away from Wei Wuxian. He seemed to know better than to release him, instead looking uncertain on how to safely contain him in a way that wouldn't cause more damage. Heaving a sigh at everything going so poorly, Wen Qing used her needles to incapacitate Jiang Wanyin,

hesitating whether to make him fully unconscious or simply immobile. Deciding that the less he knew the better, she knocked him out.

“Put him on the bed. The injuries are extensive, but not life-threatening. He will live, as long as he has respect for the second chance he has been given.” Wen Qing would not let the vermin get away with ignoring who exactly was it that saved his life this time. She inspected his injuries quickly - from what she could remember it seemed they were not dissimilar from the previous lifetime - and left in search of medicine to give herself time to process the situation.

She was a little late; she arrived after that wretched man had woken up, unlike the first time. If she had been even a little bit later... but no. Wei Wuxian would not let Jiang Wanyin hurt Wen Ning and he only needed a moment to shake loose the stupor his sect-brother's unexplainable actions put him in. Wen Ning wouldn't let Wei Wuxian be hurt, either, and unlike Jiang Wanyin Wen Ning had a golden core, so even if he wasn't the best fighter he would be able to fight back.

What to do now? If Jiang Wanyin was here then either she was the only one to come back, or Wei Wuxian convinced Wen Ning to save him. Which... would be on par for the man, neither his sense of responsibility nor his bleeding heart would let Jiang Wanyin just die. Not if he could do something about it, and no matter how much Jiang Wanyin deserved it. However, she is certain that Wei Wuxian from the previous life would not bring the man here, and would especially not endanger Wen Qing and Wen Ning. Not when he knew just how downright unconcerned Jiang Wanyin was about helping them, or even supporting the person helping them - all despite the great debt he owed them all. The disgust on his face as he surveyed her family and their meagre settlement in the Burial Mounds, as he shook off little Wen Yuan, would be forever etched in her mind. It rankled her, how that person could hold himself so above them while everything he had was thanks to them, thanks to her brothers' kind hearts and her skill as a doctor.

Should she kill him? On the one hand, he was a variable against her plans. He was a direct witness to Wen Ning and Wen Qing committing treason, and might snitch on them to the Wen guards if he ever got caught again. On the other hand, it went against her principles and would hurt Wei Wuxian and cause him even more grief. Considering what he must have just gone through she didn't want to be the one to cause him further emotional harm. It would also mean he would have less of a reason to listen to her when she tried convincing him to leave the cultivation world with her and Wen Ning. She may think of him as her little brother, and Wen Ning as well will be quick to consider Wei Wuxian family even if he had not come from the future, but Wei Wuxian was not that quick to trust. Especially not now, when he lost almost everything. Especially not Wens, members of the clan who had just destroyed his home. Right now, Wei Wuxian will cling to anything familiar to keep him going forward, and that was not Wen Qing. Even if admitting it hurt.

It bothered Wen Qing greatly, that she had to actively help Jiang Wanyin when he had shown the opposite of gratitude for it in the other life. But healing him was a necessary sacrifice if she didn't want to lose Wei Wuxian as her brother. She dearly wanted them to become a family again. So instead she will heal Jiang Wanyin to the point where he will not die, so that

he may have a chance of survival if only he applied common sense and a little stealth to keep himself safe; but she will not heal him fully, and she will not absolve him of pain.

As Wen Qing chose the appropriate herbs and salves, she took the chance to take any manuscripts mentioning her theory about the golden core transfer and burned them quickly in the small oven she used to make her medicine.

Back in Wen Ning's room her little brother was sitting quite close to Wei Wuxian and speaking to him softly. She did not know what about, since he stopped as soon as she entered. Wei Wuxian himself was kneeling by the bed Jiang Wanyin was laid on, holding his wrist as if maybe his golden core would come back any second now. He wasn't giving him any of his spiritual energy, which Wen Qing found surprising but relieving. Wei Wuxian himself was, after all, quite badly hurt. He will need the energy to support his own body, especially if he declined her offer and decided to go with Jiang Wanyin or join the campaign efforts.

"Move over," she said to him briskly, trying not to look too carefully yet at his youthful face. Even thoroughly exhausted, beaten and grieving he looked healthier than she had seen him last. The comparison was painful, reminding her of things that had happened to him, things she had done.

Wei Wuxian startled slightly, but moved obediently out of the way. She couldn't help but notice he kept chewing his lower lip.

Wen Qing applied the medicine and re-set the broken nose. Wen Ning helped her bandage Jiang Wanyin in a way that will hopefully last him till he reached safety, wherever that was. She kept thinking over her choices now, over the many different plans. She knew what she hoped for, but doubted whether it was achievable at this point. She replaced her needles to ensure Jiang Wanyin would stay asleep and not hurt himself further, then finally turned to Wei Wuxian.

"It's your turn now. Give me your wrist."

"E-excuse me?" Wei Wuxian blinked in surprise. "I'm alright. Please just tell me what's wrong with Jiang Cheng, he..." He chewed his lip more. "Does he really not have his golden core...?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. Wen Zhuliu has never spared anyone, and no one has ever recovered their core after it was melted. The only thing he can do now is learn to accept himself as he is, and learn to live without it." She made sure her voice was no-nonsense and accepting no arguments. Seeing Wei Wuxian's defeated face, she softened a little. "He is not the first one to lose his core. Many before him lived on and are happy with their lives. It will not be easy, but it is not so impossible. And he will not suffer any additional wounds after he recovers. He will simply have to be careful in the same way non-cultivators are."

Wen Qing knew that living with no core would be pride-crushing for any cultivator, but especially so for Jiang Wanyin, who used to be a great sect heir. However, it will be up to him to grow and realize that neither pride nor cultivation were the important things in life.



"I see..." Wei Wuxian sighed, his breath shaky. He looked devastated but unsurprised, like he had expected her to say that. Wen Qing wondered at how his reaction differed, and where this disparity came from, but nothing came to mind. "I guess he was right..." He whispered to himself looking down, hands tightened into fists.

Wen Qing's heart ached seeing him like this - withdrawn, unsure, young. She wanted to hide him away, but she was also sure he wouldn't let her. There was a different kind of pain she could help him with, though, so she shook her head to get all loose thoughts sorted out and commanded Wei Wuxian to strip his clothes down to his trousers.

Wei Wuxian gasped, and she felt a sense of glee that his surprise was only half-exaggerated. This young Wei Wuxian wasn't yet quite as shameless as he pretended to be and she had caught him off guard.

"Wen-guniang! This Wei Wuxian could not besmirch your name so!" Wei Wuxian draped his arms across his chest and took a step back to further emphasize his joking manner. Then the lighthearted air disappeared in an instant as Wei Wuxian straightened up and hardened his voice. "It will not be necessary. I am quite alright. I am eternally grateful for your help. If you find Jiang Cheng to be good to travel, please let me know so we can get out of your hair."

At her side, Wen Ning made an aborted motion to pull Wei Wuxian back, to stop him from leaving.

"Wei-gongzi, please... please let my sister look you over," Wen Ning implored softly, widening his eyes as he looked at their brother in all but blood. "She is really the best doctor you can find, and as all doctors she is very discreet. Please, if not for yourself, do it for Jiang-gongzi. You will need to be in full health to protect him as he recovers."

Wen Qing let her brother speak, as he clearly possessed some knowledge that she didn't. She wondered what Wei Wuxian was worried about that Wen Ning used discretion as her selling point. It couldn't simply be about not alarming the other Wens to their presence. If they had any intention of doing that, both intruders would have been captured way earlier, and Wei Wuxian had to have known it.

Wei Wuxian closed his eyes as if he was warring with himself and finally started loosening the belt with a huff.

"You are right, Wen Ning... you have been the whole time. Wen-guniang, I count on your expertise and discretion, then."

As he finally stood before her in his underclothes, Wen Qing surveyed the damage. The most obvious one at the front was the Wen brand - it was mostly healed, though she could see some scabbing still left over. It probably didn't pain him too much anymore, but she will give him some salve for it anyway. Just to make sure no infection set in, and to relieve any unpleasant skin pulling. Other than that, she could see his body was exhausted from the way his muscles kept shaking by themselves, but no other outward injuries. She twirled her hand to let him know to turn around.

Wen Qing sucked a breath in. She suddenly realized why Wen Ning had hinted at discretion.

Wei Wuxian's back was marred with whip marks, so many she could not count at the moment. Some of them crisscrossing, some parallel, some even overlapping in places. The horrifying part was that the wounds weren't simply smooth lines but jagged branches split off along the main marks, a sign of some electrical damage.

Zidian. It must have been.

Wen Qing did not know why, or how it happened. She had not been at the attack on Lotus Pier, so she could not throw judgement on the Madam. Perhaps it was a way to hold off the invaders. Perhaps a way to placate them. Seeing the long-healed scars of that very same variety under the fresh whip marks, however, she couldn't help but think any such justification was merely an excuse. Both the new marks and the old scars stretched over the whole of his back and disappeared under the trousers.

"Get on the floor."

"What...?"

"Lie down on the floor!" Her voice cracked in the middle. Although Wei Wuxian couldn't see her, he must have noticed something was off and did as told.

Wen Qing drank the tears that escaped the usually tight hold she had on her emotions, desperately trying to get herself together. This was not about her, and an emotional breakdown would not help anyone right now. She needed to keep calm and heal Wei Wuxian as best she could.

She could not help the crushing sense of disappointment at herself, however. It threatened to drown her, accusing her of being a bad sister, a bad doctor.

She had never known. But perhaps she just hadn't looked carefully enough. The signs, now that she realized, had always been there. Why had he never confided in her...? Had she ever given him any reason to doubt her love, her support? Had he thought that she would not take him seriously, that she wouldn't care? She will never know now and it will haunt her to her grave.

"Honestly, you should have told me about the wounds right from the start! There is no need to put a brave face in front of a doctor!" She scolded him lightly to bring back some normalcy, but her heart wasn't in it. "I will need to put an ointment directly on the marks, and a different one on the inflamed skin around it. I will give you some of it and you will put it twice daily until healed. I will also give you a salve that you will massage into the scars every evening, after the fresh wounds are scarred over. It will relieve the pain and reduce the scar tissue."

"I... Thank you. This is much more than I..." Wei Wuxian stopped half-way through.

It must have been odd, having a Wen who was supposed to be his enemy visibly care for him in such a familiar manner. Perhaps he believed it was more than his acquaintance with Wen Ning warranted, but Wen Qing believed anyone would have been affected in her place.

“This is exactly what you deserve, and not any less. This is exactly what you should expect after receiving a wound like this.” She took a deep breath to prepare herself. “I do not know how you acquired these wounds. The new ones, or the old ones. If someone inflicted them on you as punishment or as part of training, that was unfounded and unjustifiable. And if you received the wounds during a nighthunt or some other service to your sect, then your superiors should have made sure you were never in such a situation again and sent someone better equipped to deal with it.”

The whole time Wen Qing talked, she continued applying the medicine as carefully as she could. Wei Wuxian did not make a peep; she could only hope he was listening and that he internalized at least some of what she said.

Wen Ning was sat at her side, handing her the appropriate medicine when needed, opening jars when her hands got too slippery to do it. His face was grim as he remained quiet. They continued in silence for a while, until Wen Qing ran out of space to apply the ointments.

“Right. I am finished with your back. Time to get your trousers off.” She announced matter-of-factly, putting her hands on his trousers at the sides.

“Wha-aat?!” Wei Wuxian’s voice broke in the middle and turned squeaky at the end. He half raised himself off the floor and looked at her over his shoulder. His eyes were wide as saucers, mouth hanging open. Startled but quickly getting himself composed again, Wen Ning raised a hand to his mouth to hide his smile.

“I am finished with your back,” Wen Qing repeated calmly, as if she hadn’t said what she had exactly because it would get Wei Wuxian out of his head. “I need your trousers off so I can attend to the rest of your wounds, the ones that extend past your trousers, where I can’t see.” She raised her eyebrow, accepting no argument and waiting for him to realize that the only thing he could do was comply. After all, she had his best interests in mind; he should start learning that some time and why not start now?

Grumbling under his breath what she was sure were unflattering words against her, Wei Wuxian shuffled his trousers off and promptly plonked his flaming face on the floor.

“Don’t worry, you are not the first patient nor the last one to get naked before me. I am a doctor, remember?” Wen Qing comforted him. She would rather he be more at ease with her, but considering this was his actual first time meeting her, that couldn’t be helped. On the bright side, if he stays with them, maybe she will be able to teach him how to be a good patient.

The whole procedure lasted another half-hour. During that time Wen Ning was surprisingly chatty and entertained Wei Wuxian with his daily anecdotes, such as finding a squirrel with a broken paw and nursing it to health, or practising shooting with the tips he got from Wei Wuxian. Wei Wuxian didn’t lift his face off the floor, but he did keep making encouraging hms and ahs, slightly muffled by the floor but very varied in tone and emotion. Wen Qing was heartened to see him coming back to himself even a little bit. She understood that he was under exceptional duress, but seeing him so despondently quiet had never boded well.

She wasn't surprised that it was Wen Ning and not her who got him to relax. They had met before and knew each other longer, no matter how superficially. Wen Ning's voice as well was softer and more soothing; she couldn't quite control herself in doctor mode, often unconsciously slipping into an impersonal, cold and even tone. Good for informing patients of maladies, but not for putting people at ease.

Finally, she finished bandaging his wounds. They all got up and Wen Ning helped Wei Wuxian put his clothes back on. Wen Qing steeled herself for the next part. She was quite sure she knew what Wei Wuxian will say, but she couldn't not try at all.

"What are your plans now?"

Wei Wuxian turned his head towards her, tilting it confusedly. "What do you mean, Wen-guniang?"

"I mean after Jiang Wanyin is healed enough to travel, what are your plans?"

"Yes, I understood what you were asking," Wei Wuxian replied, crossing his arms. "I'm just not sure why you would want to know. You've already put yourself in danger by helping us. What benefits would further association bring you?"

"The situation as it is now is precarious. It will only get worse, for whichever side," she answered rather off topic and a bit vaguely, sure he would understand her anyway. "I believe it will be best to remove ourselves as far as possible."

Wei Wuxian breathed in loudly. "You mean... you want to leave your sect?"

She looked him in the eye and answered, holding all her hope and wishes tightly locked in the deepest parts of her heart.

"Yes. And I would like you to go with us."

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Wen Qing and Wen Ning stood in the shadows of the grove of trees, silently watching as the merchant carriage hiding Jiang Wanyin and a disguised Wei Wuxian left Yiling. When they couldn't see the silhouette in the distance anymore they returned to the supervisory office. Wen Qing schooled her features into a cold mask to prevent any other Wens from bothering her. She guided Wen Ning silently back to his rooms, closed the door and set a new silencing talisman. She turned back around to face Wen Ning and crossed her arms.

"So. Care to explain yourself, A-Ning?"

Wen Ning bowed his head, hiding the sheepish smile he couldn't suppress. She sighed, uncrossing her arms, feeling half-proud that he managed to deceive her, half-offended that she let herself be played like a fiddle.

"I'm sorry?" Wen Ning chanced looking up at her from under his bangs, trying to placate her but also immensely pleased with himself after seeing that she was not really angry with him. "When I... woke up? Transferred here? I don't really know how to call it... But when I

noticed that everything had changed, I was at Lotus Pier, and I had already been seen by Wei-gongzi. He kept asking me if I can really save Jiang-gongzi, so..." He trailed off, frustrated a bit.

Wen Qing understood the dilemma. Since the original Wen Ning had already promised to save Jiang Wanyin, he couldn't just take his words back. It would mean that Wei Wuxian would lose his tiny, sprouting trust in him and would attempt the rescue himself, which would most probably end badly. Besides that, it would also mean Wei Wuxian would be lost to them even if he and Jiang Wanyin survived. Wen Ning could perhaps pretend to make an attempt at saving Jiang Wanyin and just let himself fail, but it would not endear Wei Wuxian to them in the least either.

More than that, it would weigh on Wen Ning's conscience forever. He already knew from previous experience that he *could* save them both with minimal (at the time) consequence to himself. If he chose to leave Jiang Wanyin to his fate, Wen Ning would be no better than the rest of the Wen sect oppressing the cultivation world. He would be no better than the guards at the camps their family had been kept in. He would be no better than the rest of the cultivation world, who had closed their eyes at the Wens' suffering simply because it was more convenient for them. Despite it being a second chance, there was only one viable option in the end.

Her mind finally settling down, Wen Qing sat down next to her brother on the bed and took his hands into hers. "A-Ning... I am so glad you are here. I had hoped, maybe the three of us... But this is good, too. We are together, and we can help him. Maybe this time he will not have to lose quite as much as before," she admitted, voice shaking, sight getting blurry.

"Jie... jie..." Wen Ning whispered, as if sharing a secret that would disappear if he spoke even a bit louder. "I'm alive, jie... I can feel my golden core, I can feel my heart beat, I... I can cry again-" he broke off, choking on the deluge of emotions that he had to suppress the whole time since he got back in time.

Seeing her brother like this, *alive*, Wen Qing couldn't help herself and threw her arms around Wen Ning, gathering him to her chest and hugging him as tight as she could. Truly, it was a miracle. Her little brother, alive and well. She could feel his chest expanding and compressing with each breath he took, she could feel the wetness of his tears dampening the collar of her robes as he pressed his face to her neck, she could feel the warmth of his skin at her back as he pressed his own hands to hold her closer.

They gave themselves time to soak up each other's presence, feeling comforted at being together in this new and unpredictable situation. It would have felt as if everything was right in the world, if only there wasn't a gulping void where one other person should have been in their arms as well.

"Now we just have to hope Wei Wuxian will change his mind and come to look for us." Wen Qing sat down at the table, watching Wen Ning serve her tea.

"I have talked to him a little, during our escape from Lotus Pier," Wen Ning shared. "Jiang Wanyin was unconscious, so I tried to tell him about you."

“Oh? Is that so?” She raised her brow, amused. “What did you talk about? Did you want to prepare him for my bedside manner as a doctor?”

“No, no.” he hurried to reassure her. As if she would ever get offended by her brother. “More like... as a sister. So that he could get some... perspective. On what sibling relationships can look like.”

Wen Qing turned that idea over in her mind, sipping her tea delicately. After so much crying it was a relief to get some fluids into her. “Hmm... It couldn’t hurt, I guess. But I don’t see it making him change his mind. Not when it’s something he only heard about and hadn’t experienced himself.”

“But he did experience it,” Wen Ning looked at her with a laugh hidden in his eyes. “You fussed over him like a proper big sister should when dressing his wounds.” He turned serious, “And you talked to him about the scars. I think just hearing you say that he didn’t deserve that treatment, and that he wasn’t responsible for other people’s misjudgments has relieved at least part of his feeling of duty. I also... talked to him about being burdened with other people’s expectations, and that he does not have to meet them just because someone believes it to be true. That he should follow his own path, to fulfill his heart’s duty to the best of his abilities.”

“It might have been a bit too vague, A-Ning,” Wen Qing warned him not to set his hopes too high. “He still feels beholden to the Jiangs. It will be difficult for him to break off, but perhaps... Hm.” She changed tracks. “I don’t believe Jiang Wanyin will be able to lead the Jiang sect anytime soon, if ever. Jiang Yanli will never be respected due to her being a woman and perceived as mediocre, so her becoming a sect leader won’t make sense. I can only see the Jiang sect dissolving completely, or becoming part of their mother’s sect.”

“Meishan Yu, wasn’t it? That’s where Wei-gongzi is taking Jiang-gongzi to recover?”

“Yes. Honestly, it is difficult to guess what they will do. Perhaps Jiang Yanli will marry a respected cultivator who could become the sect leader, or at least until Jiang Wanyin becomes more emotionally stable. Or the Meishan Yu sect will help them govern the Jiang sect.”

“They will have to take Lotus Pier back first. Which Wei-gongzi will want to be a part of,” Wen Ning noticed.

He was right, of course. Whatever path Wei Wuxian decided to follow in the end, first he will fulfil his promise to the late Jiang-zongzhu. He will protect the Jiang children with his life, and he will want to give them their home and dignity back. He said as much when he declined Wen Qing’s offer, deciding to bring Jiang Wanyin to Meishan where his sister had already been hiding. He hoped Jiang Yanli’s familiar and soothing presence will help keep Jiang Wanyin calm and strengthen his will to live. After that he planned to join the Sunshot campaign efforts.

“Jie... are you sure Jiang-gongzi won’t wake the whole way to Meishan?” Wen Ning asked anxiously.

“Don’t worry so much, A-Ning. Who was it that boasted to Wei Wuxian about his sister being the best doctor? And now you doubt me?” She teased him gently, then sighed. “As long as Wei Wuxian follows my directions for removing and inserting the needles, he will be fine. I am more worried about Wei Wuxian’s own wounds.”

“Were they really so dangerous? He seemed to be healing already.”

“They were starting to, yes, and the few days here let him gain his strength back. His golden core is strong, it should help heal his back in a few days of not too much exhaustion. However, considering they are on the run and trying to be stealthy, he will be using his core for things other than just healing. And the wounds are still open - if he is not careful they may get infected, which might set back his recovery by even weeks. That is what I’m worried about. That he will be so focused on getting them to Meishan safely and protecting Jiang Wanyin that he will forget about dressing his own damaged back.”

Suddenly Wen Qing glared at Wen Ning, narrowing her eyes dangerously. “Shouldn’t you know this already? Have my teachings been for naught?”

“Jie...” Wen Ning backed a bit to increase the distance between them, moving ungainly like a crab.

“I suppose I was too lenient as a teacher. We will increase your medical training, A-Ning. No more gallivanting off to the woods to practice archery! You’re already good at it, practice what you’re still lacking instead!” She scolded him harshly, paradoxically feeling happiness swell in her chest.



Wen Qing sat at her work desk, reading over the letter for the second time. She felt relieved and happy, but also the feeling of loss would not leave her be.

“Jie? Did something happen?” Wen Ning cracked the door partly open and put his head through. She waved her hand at him to get inside, and gave him the letter.

“I see Wei-gongzi safely arrived in Meishan,” Wen Ning brightened at the good news.

“I’m surprised he wrote to me in the first place,” she hummed contentedly. “Jiang Wanyin proves to be a cantankerous character, but no surprises there.”

“Wei-gongzi does seem to be more displeased with that than he used to at this point, though. Perhaps this time he will not have such trouble breaking away from the Jiang sect.” Wen Ning pointed hopefully.

“Considering the Jiang sect is no more at the moment, that is not too surprising. The true trial will come when Lotus Pier is retaken. We should not be too hasty,” warned Wen Qing. It was rather hypocritical of her, as she herself felt rather optimistic as well.

“What shall we do? Send a response?”

“Obviously not. We cannot risk that anyone other than Wei Wuxian will see the letter, and since we do not know what his standing in Meishan is it would be too dangerous.” Wen Qing sighed, burning the letter in her small oven. “Anyway, he is departing for Qinghe to join the campaign soon - whatever that means, the idiot didn’t include any time period we could use as a reference. Our letter could miss him and that would put us in danger with no benefit to it.”

Wen Ning made a sad noise. The cheeky boy has been getting too brave, willing to challenge her and make her change her mind with various underhanded methods. It was something he learned from Wei Wuxian, which was the only reason Wen Qing gave him a pass. It certainly wasn’t because it was effective.

She pinched his cheek hard in retaliation. “Go and see that everything is prepared! We cannot let the yao escape earlier than planned, and we cannot allow anyone to stumble upon it. Take your group and stealthily check that everything is undisturbed. *Stealthily*,” she emphasized, remembering the last time.

Some of Wen Chao’s thugs had been visiting, ostensibly to receive some medicine for Wang Lingjiao’s frequent headaches. (Wen Qing wondered if she got tired of Wen Chao’s brand of sexual prowess and decided to make use of the old and tried method of forever postponing any advances.) One of them had noticed Wen Ning’s friends sneaking off to the woods and had followed them. Thankfully they had noticed and rerouted to a nearby river, pretending they were sneaking off on a break. Still, it had been a bit too close for Wen Qing’s comfort.

“Are you going to be sitting the whole day at the desk, jie?” Wen Ning reproached, looking at her balefully and stroking his reddened cheek with one hand.

“Don’t you berate me, A-Ning! Who’s the older sibling here?” She retorted quickly, then answered him seriously. “Yes, I will probably spend the rest of my day here. I need to write a few letters - Uncle Four asked for additional directions, and Auntie Hu was worried about accommodations and money. Then I need to replenish the muscle relaxant salve and a few other ointments, I’m running out.”

“You should take a break, jie...” Wen Ning softened his gaze from the previously scolding one.

“I can’t. I need to pretend nothing is happening, and that means attending to my usual business as doctor. They can’t start getting suspicious now, A-Ning, we’re so close!”

It was true. They were close to their goal, which was to leave not only the Wen sect, but also the wider cultivation world. They planned to settle in Ninghe, southwest of Wuzhou, along with the rest of their family. Wen Qing wanted to save as many of them as she could, and that meant lengthy conversations through letters. She wasn’t exactly able to just leave Yiling for long periods of time. She first contacted those whom she knew personally at this point, and after convincing them to join her plan, recruited them to speak directly with other Wen clan members who might prefer to be away from the current situation. However, she was still the mastermind and any doubts had to be assuaged by her. It was a risky undertaking, but so far everyone was happy to go along with the plan. Even now she gained more people than there had ever been at the Burial Mounds settlement. Since it was a big group of people, many of



whom lived scattered all around Qishan, they were being transported to Ninghe sporadically in smaller groups.

It was a long process and very nerve wracking, although not half as much as breaking everyone out of the camp at Qiongqi-do had been. This time, for one, no one would be witness to the escape. For another, she had more resources - time, money and prestige. She had her personal savings from her profession as a doctor for the common people of Yiling (and previously Buyetian, before she was transferred to the Yiling Supervisory Office) that she planned to use as spending money when they will be on the move. She had already used her inheritance to buy the small but very out of the way land in Ninghe.

Barely anyone lived there and most of the buildings were abandoned. It was not actually an unprofitable land - it was simply that it was so far on the very outskirts of Jianghu that not even rogue cultivators frequented there. Thus, the small town inhabitants were left to the mercy of local countermeasures against any resentful beings. It was, of course, insufficient in the long run. The younger commoners had left the town in search of better opportunities and safer communities, while the older folk stayed but slowly perished in unexplained circumstances or of old age. In the end only a handful of locals were left, and most of them rather old. They welcomed the new neighbors gladly, and in case anyone somehow decided to search for her family so far away, they will protect their identities in exchange for community service - medical, repairs, or cultivation-wise.

There was no issue with stealthily evacuating the non-fighting Wens. The biggest issue was of course Wen Qing herself, and Wen Ning by association. Wen Ruohan had a massive army and an even more massive number of subjects. He would not notice if some of the people left, as long as their presence or absence was of no visible consequence to him. Wen Qing, though, was a trusted and respected doctor, and head of the Yiling Supervisory Office. Any disappearance would be followed swiftly with investigation and might lead the Wen in charge to the new settlement, making all her plans moot. Wen Qing wasn't sure she could be thorough enough in erasing tracks if anyone got suspicious about her sudden disappearance. Wen Ning would come under suspicion as well, simply because he was her brother. Everyone knew that she loved him dearly and would not leave him behind voluntarily.

That is why she had to get herself and Wen Ning killed.

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“Help! I can’t-” Wen Ning shouted, breaking off in the middle as he was caught in the yaoguai’s maw. The blood splashed the surroundings as Wen Ning lost his consciousness, making a trail as the yaoguai turned around and ran deeper into the woods. Wen Qing screamed in anguish and darted after them, ignoring the shouts of other injured Wen cultivators who tried to stop her.

Later, the two remaining survivors will say that it must have been the fault of the new cultivators inducted into the Wen sect. Wen Ning had been forced by the main guard to train them and his usual group of trusted cultivators had been left behind, deciding to visit their families until they were needed by Wen Ning again. The new cultivators believed themselves better than timid Wen Ning and rarely heeded his commands, preferring their own judgement. It was their disobedience and hubris that led them to be massacred by the yaoguai that had

somehow appeared in the woods near Yiling, terrorizing the nearby farmers and disrupting the trade and supply chain of the Wen sect.

It was unfortunate that their incompetence had to result in the death of Wen Ning-gongzi, who might have been timid but who readily helped anyone who asked. It was even more unfortunate that Wen-guniang had heard of the escalating situation and rushed out to help her little brother. Everyone knew that while Wen-guniang had formidable cultivation her focus was on medical application, not fighting.

When the reinforcements entered the woods to look for their lost sect members and to defeat the yaoguai, they were too late. They found the monster hidden in a burrow under a mountain of leaves, munching on the bodies of Wen Qing-guniang and Wen Ning-gongzi. The Wen cultivators were lucky to find the beast during feeding time, as the surprise factor helped them immensely to subdue the yaoguai. Still, it was a tough fight, and in the end the victory felt bitter. No one wanted to be the one to inform Sect Leader Wen of the demise of his prized pupil and her brother.

It was a very miserable time to be a Wen cultivator stationed in Yiling.



Wen Qing bent over Wen Ning, loosening his robes to tend to his wound.

“It’s not too bad, thankfully. The beast still chewed through the steel guard on your chest, but at least it only left a few shallow puncture marks,” she sighed in relief, looking in her robes for the qiankun pouch with her usual medicine. “But did you have to spray the chicken blood so widely? It got on my robes.”

“Sorry, jiejie... I did not expect the bag to burst like that,” Wen Ning said sheepishly. “But at least the blood trail it left was short. It gave me more time than I expected to escape and get the corpses.”

Wen Qing sighed again, the stress and tightness leaving her body in increments. “Well, we’re not out of the woods yet, almost literally. We have to get out of here and to Tanzhou as soon as possible, just in case anyone gets suspicious. Come, get up and change into these clothes.”

She handed him the farmer robes she had prepared earlier. The robes were of a rather rough material, just enough to not seem like the siblings have money, but also not like they were destitute. They wanted to avoid bandits, but they also didn’t want to be shown the door at the inns.

They traveled to Tanzhou quickly, often on foot but catching a ride with any travelers with a carriage whenever possible. They set themselves up in the first inn they saw without problems and took their dinner in the rented room.

“Tomorrow we have to find Auntie Zhao. She will let us stay in her house while she visits her mother, but that will take no more than a few months. Hopefully it will be...” Wen Qing stopped mid-sentence, not wanting to jinx what they were hoping for.

And that was that Wei Wuxian would join them before Auntie Zhao came back and they were forced to find new accommodations. Truthfully, Wen Qing hadn't heard from him since that first and only letter. She will need to find someone trustworthy to forward her letter detailing their location to him. She prayed that he was alright and didn't get into any trouble. She hadn't heard anything of note, so maybe he was keeping his head low for a change. Still, even if he was, that was unexpected of him and only made her worry more.

"Maybe we both should write," suggested Wen Ning. "It will be more welcoming, like we both are waiting for him. It will also appease him if he heard of our supposed deaths."

"You're right, let's do that. And let's detail our plan for staying here, just in case neither of us is home if he does come here." Wen Qing took out a piece of parchment and wet her brush with ink.

*Wei Wuxian,*

*This is me. We talked about the responsibilities of sect disciples and their worth.*

*I hope you continue to hold the beliefs regarding the benefits of cultivation in the commoners' lives.*

*Please do not place too much stock in rumors. We are fine. Looking forward to seeing you in Tanzhou,*

*Your Doctor*

*Wei-ge*

('Wei-ge?' mouthed Wen Qing, mouth curving up. Wen Ning's cheeks darkened a pretty red, so deep that she hasn't seen in years.)

*This is your little brother in spirit. I cannot wait to see you, no matter when it is.*

*I hope you will visit us soon. There is a lot I have to tell you yet, and a lot I want to hear from you.*

*Your Peace*

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They lived in Tanzhou rather peacefully, if one discounted the fear that their subterfuge had been discovered. They could have joined their family in Ninghe and been done with the war, with the cultivation world in general. However, they could not forget that two should have been three, and hope kept them tethered to the city. Wen Qing used her doctor skills to support them, relying solely on common folk medical knowledge to hide any proof of them being cultivators. Wen Ning used his archery skills to get an in with the local hunters, who taught him more hunting techniques and how to handle other hunting tools.

From time to time Wen Qing received letters from Ninghe, detailing the daily life there. The renovation was going smoothly; a few farming fields have already been set up and the earliest

crops have been successfully harvested; the locals were glad to have newcomers and quickly welcomed them to the community; they have even managed to set up a trade agreement with a neighboring city, only 20 li away.

The only thing left to do was to wait.

As the months granted to them by Auntie Zhou were slowly coming to a close, Wen Qing heard news that Lotus Pier had been retaken by an army led by Nie Mingjue and Wei Wuxian. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and longed to hear a melodious laugh she used to be graced by almost daily.

A few days later Wen Qing was at the market, browsing through the herb and spice stall for her dwindling ointment and salve materials. She was startled when Wen Ning collided with her almost violently, shouting for her all the while.

“Jiejie! Jiejie!”

“What, what is it?” she worried, looking left and right as panic started rising in her.

“T-there...!” Wen Ning gasped, fully out of breath, as his shaking finger pointed at a figure in the distance.

Wen Qing abandoned her shopping, straining her eyes to see better, to make sure it was not a mirage.

Wei Wuxian came home.

She couldn’t suppress the gasp that left her mouth, her whole body trembling. She gave herself this moment to savor as her brother approached them, gait strong and confident but the curved corner of his mouth betraying apprehension. Wen Ning didn’t let him be uneasy for long, however, and as soon as Wei Wuxian came within touching distance Wen Ning grasped his hand and brought him into an embrace. Wen Qing looked at them, chest full of elation. She put a hand on each of her brothers’ backs and felt them breathe, together, in sync.

After they returned to their temporary home, Wen Qing busied herself with making tea and snacks while Wen Ning and Wei Wuxian exchanged stories. Wen Ning talked of their faked death, their life here in Tanzhou as doctor and hunter, and most importantly - of the settlement in Ninghe, what had been accomplished and what more they were hoping to accomplish still. Wei Wuxian talked in general terms of his stay in Meishan and in more detail of his successes on the field, as well as the current state of the Sunshot campaign.

“I can’t help but notice that most of your stories are about all the help you’ve given to the non-cultivators,” Wen Qing voiced lightly as she put the tea set on the table and served them all before any of her brother could do so. She was met with protests before she cut the complaints with a sharp look.

She sat down between them and picked up her teacup, keeping an eye on Wei Wuxian to let him know she expected some kind of response.

“Ah, well...” He scratched at his head, thinking his words through. “You were right.”

“Oh? What exactly was I right about?” Wen Qing smirked behind her teacup. “Older sisters are always right, you will have to be more specific.”

Wei Wuxian just sighed exasperated, rolling his eyes at her. “The time when I was in your care, when you tried to convince me to go with you and help the common people.” He looked at his own tea as if it was the source of all his troubles.

“Everyone was concerned with the damage done to their own territories, their homes and their cultivators. No one thought about the damage done to the commoners, and no one cared when our efforts to stop the Wens only ended up bringing more suffering to them. We acted against the Wens to protect our livelihoods and to get revenge for the destruction to our homes, but in the end... from the non-cultivator’s perspective... we were no better than the Wen,” he finished in a whisper, the pain in his eyes hinting at the anguish he felt when no one else wanted to even acknowledge the futile situation of the common people that cultivators were supposed to protect.

Wen Ning reached out and put his hand on top of Wei Wuxian’s on the table, squeezing in support. Wen Qing smiled at them both, immensely proud of the strong, upright men she could claim as her brothers.

“You did well,” she reassured Wei Wuxian. “I, for one, am proud of you.”

He looked up at her from where he was watching Wen Ning hold his hand, eyes slightly wider with a wet sheen to them. She could not remember the last time she had seen Wei Wuxian cry; it was a rare occurrence and she could only hope he was overwhelmed with only good feelings.

He swallowed his tea. “Thank you. That... that means a lot to me,” he admitted, eyes looking to the side and meeting Wen Ning’s, who was looking at him with a wide smile, happiness shining through. Wei Wuxian couldn’t stay indifferent and helplessly smiled back.

“How have you been though?” asked Wen Ning, attentively observing the other. “I hope the travel to Meishan wasn’t too difficult?”

“Oh, no, the travel was fine,” laughed Wei Wuxian, waving his hand.

“What wasn’t fine, then?” trapped him Wen Qing.

Wei Wuxian laughed once more, this time more stiffly, waving his hand more vigorously.

“No, no! Everything was fine! Well, as fine as taking part in a war could be,” he amended.

Both Wen Ning and Wen Qing looked at him silently and finally he couldn’t take the pressure, confessing. “Well, staying in Meishan was a bit awkward. I barely knew anyone there, and was basically an outsider.”

“Weren’t Jiang-guniang and Jiang-gongzi outsiders, then?” Wen Qing inquired smoothly.

“Of course not, they’re family! Yu-zongzhu’s grandchildren, that’s different!” Wei Wuxian protested.

“Oh? I had heard that Wei Wuxian was raised as part of the Jiang family, but perhaps I was mistaken,” she said a bit pointedly.

Wei Wuxian fell silent.

“I have only ever been a disciple, albeit one that enjoyed certain privileges.” His body stiffened, uncomfortable with the subject.

“Really? What kind of privileges?” Wen Ning asked eagerly, inching closer to Wei Wuxian.

Seeing Wen Ning’s honest enthusiasm he relaxed again. “I had quarters near the family and often dined at their table. I could attend training with Jiang Cheng, and any expenses I had were paid by Jiang-shushu.”

Wen Qing blinked. “Aren’t expenses of the disciples borne by the sect anyway? As part of the reward disciples get for serving their sect loyally?” So much for privileges.

“Are they? I don’t really know. I was never really interested in how a sect is run,” Wei Wuxian stroked the side of his nose.

“Seems to me like you were a normal disciple, then. Perhaps dining at the main family’s table could be considered a privilege, but honestly it seems more bothersome to me.” Wen Qing stated decisively. “Anyway, the Jiang sect as it used to be is no more. You do not owe them your whole life to slave away trying to bring it back to its previous station. That is more the role of the sect leader.”

“Ah, Jiang Cheng is... indisposed still. He is better physically, but the Meishan Yu healers suggested that he recuperate in Meishan, and Yu-zongzhu concurred.”

Well, it seemed to Wen Qing like Jiang Wanyin was still drowning in pity-party and wanted to have everything given on a platter, with no effort from him. However, looking at how Wei Wuxian wouldn’t meet any of their eyes and busied himself with the empty teacup, she suspected there was more.

“Something else happened? Out with it!” She commanded with her strongest big sister voice, leaving Wei Wuxian no choice but to comply. Wei Wuxian was almost as susceptible to the big sister voice as Wen Ning, just in a more bratty way.

“Jiang Cheng, he... “ he swallowed spit and continued, “we... you... you saved us. We owe you a great debt. If not for Wen Ning, Jiang Cheng and I would be dead. If not for you, Jiang Cheng and I would have succumbed to wounds or got caught, which would have led to our death anyway.”

“There is no need for debt between us,” Wen Qing interjected gently.

Wei Wuxian shot her a baleful look for interrupting him. “We owe you a debt,” he reiterated, “and Jiang Cheng wanted to kill you. No... he wanted *me* to kill you.”

Wen Qing couldn't say she was surprised. At the time, Jiang Wanyin was in a rather vulnerable state, and even aside from that in the past he had been very violent and aggressive whenever she had met him. Still, perhaps she did not expect he would feel such a vehement hatred toward the two people who saved his life, and to such an extent. It seemed extreme, to try to force Wei Wuxian, who had only been trying to save their lives and serve what remained of the Jiang sect faithfully, who was a kind and just soul, to kill two people rather insignificant in regards to the massacre of Lotus Pier.

Mulling over what she had just learned, Wen Qing couldn't help but be relieved that Wei Wuxian had left such toxic environment. Glancing at Wei Wuxian, she could see that Jiang Wanyin's behavior weighed on him heavily. She refilled his teacup, put his hands around it. Then she took Wen Ning's hands and joined them together, the three siblings holding one teacup.

"Wei Wuxian," she stated firmly, "I do not hold you to blame for Jiang Wanyin's words or behavior. From what I've seen you are a conscientious, dependable person who shows compassion and generosity to everyone you meet. I will say it only once, and I hope you will remember it. There are no debts between us, because... I hope... we can be family."

Wei Wuxian looked up from their joined hands and smiled.

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"Xian-gege! Higher! Higher!!!"

Wen Yuan's amused shrieks rang around the field as Wei Wuxian threw him up in the air, a gaggle of children running around them and impatiently waiting for their turn.

"How's that, little radish? High enough?" Wei Wuxian's own laughter tinkled in his every word.

Wen Qing huffed from where she was harvesting medical herbs, pleased at the scenery that had become commonplace in her life. This time around little Wen Yuan didn't lose his parents, but he still grew attached to his Xian-gege, badgering him daily to be entertained. Wei Wuxian himself had been enamoured with all the children in their settlement and strove to give them a life full of love and care. He was an excellent caretaker, fun yet strict, but not unyielding. He also taught basic cultivation and literacy classes in their little town, the small school something that had been established by a determined group of both local and Wen grannies some months back. He took to teaching the same as to caretaking - like a duck to water.

However, for all that they led fulfilled lives in Ninghe, isolated from the cultivation world, Wei Wuxian had not forgotten his roots and teachings. Every few weeks he took Wen Ning and a few other cultivators to go nighthunting to Jianghu as a rogue cultivator family, going round the more secluded places and helping people with both cultivation-related problems as well as regular troubles such as damage to buildings after a storm.

It was on one such nighthunting trip that he met Lan Wangji once more. Wen Qing did not know the details of their previous acquaintance, nor the reunion. No one else had witnessed it

and Wei Wuxian was surprisingly tight lipped about it. However, judging by how his tongue twisted every time someone teased him for details, or how red his face went whenever Hanguang-jun visited, Wen Qing was sure it was nothing to worry about.

It did rankle her a bit that her big sister privileges weren't met every time Wei Wuxian refused to spill even the smallest detail, but she could live with it.

Wen Qing had everything she ever wished to have.

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This fic has been converted for free using [AOYee!](#)



## **author note**

So I managed to finish the first chapter of the sequel on time, which is WWX's Birthday!

As promised, it is wangxian-focused, hehe!

You can find it here: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/34843792/chapters/86762425>  
or go to the series page.

## End Notes

Ninghe - Ning 宁 for 'peaceful' (same as Wen Ning's name), He 河 for 'old, broad river'  
Wuzhou - the location of one of the small sects that took part in the Sunshot Campaign,  
Wuzhou Li

I have used a few dialog lines from the Exiled FREBELS translation, particularly Wen Qing's lines in the beginning scene, and Jiang Cheng's lines in the Yiling Supervisory Office.

(I might make a small sequel with the wangxian reunion and the development of their relationship, but don't hold me to that - edit 16/10: yes, I'm writing the sequel)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!